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Employment Security Wins \$25,000 Award for Tax Filing Tools

OLYMPIA – The Washington State Employment Security Department won a \$25,000 national award for developing and marketing tools that allow employers to file and pay unemployment taxes online. Employment Security Commissioner Sylvia P. Mundy accepted the award Wednesday during the National Association of State Workforce Agencies' annual conference in Seattle.

Washington was one of only three first-place winners in the U.S. Department of Labor's annual National Customer Service Awards program. The state received the prestigious Compass Award for providing excellent customer service through the use of technology.

The award recognizes Employment Security's *E-Pay*, *UIFastTax*, and *UIWebTax* systems and a statewide marketing program to promote those tools. It is accompanied by a \$25,000 grant to help expand the project and assist other states in similar efforts.

"Employment Security has built an electronic tax filing, processing, and payment system that addresses the full range of taxpayer needs," Mundy said. "This award will allow us to improve our tax filing tools, share what we've learned with other states, and step up our marketing efforts so that all employers can take advantage of these services."

"Businesses are the real winners, because electronic tax filing and payments save them time and money," she added.

Only a few years ago, Employment Security manually processed nearly all wage and tax information filed by employers.

Today, fewer staff are needed to process reports and information is easier to track. Earlier this year, the department discontinued mailing tax-form materials to employers who had transitioned to electronic filing, saving more than \$101,000 in printing costs plus \$53,000 in postage.

The department reinvested those savings in marketing its electronic services, with the goal of realizing additional savings in the future. An ambitious campaign by the department last year converted 17,000 new businesses to electronic tax filing and payment methods. Staff worked closely with employers to educate them about electronic filing and even helped them prepare their taxes.

Employers say they are delighted with the improvements.

"The *UIFastTax* software calculates everything for us. I just push the button and go," said Suzette Plautz, payroll coordinator for US Marine, an Arlington, Wash., boat manufacturer.

Additional information about electronic tax filing is available on Employment Security's Web site at <http://www.wa.gov/esd/uifasttax>.